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College of Arts and Sciences

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Document Title: The Argument Pyramid
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Course: Engl 1158
Course Title: American Voices: Southern Literature

Year of Award: Fall 2013

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Fall 2013 Knight Award for Writing Exercises and

The Knight Award for Writing Exercises recognizes excellence in short exercises and/or handouts designed to improve student writing. Appropriate topics may be drawn from the whole range of writing issues, large scale to small scale, such as development of theses, use of secondary sources, organization of evidence, awareness of audience, attention to sentence patterns (e.g., passive/active voice; coordination/ subordination), attention to diction, uses of punctuation, attention to mechanics (e.g., manuscript formats, apostrophes). Exercises and handouts may be developed for use in or out of class.

Submissions should comprise three parts: (1) A copy of the handouts or instructions that go to students. (2) An explanation of the exercise/ handout and of the principles behind it, addressed to future instructors who may use the material. (3) If possible, an example of a student response.

Submissions may range in length from one to four or five pages.

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The two winning entries will receive \$350; second place winners (if any) will receive \$125.

Submissions are due in 101 McGraw Hall by Friday, December 20. No exceptions can be made.

Fall 2013 Knight Award for Writing Exercises and Handouts

~Please Print Clearly. Do not staple. Use paper clips only~

Instructor's name

Adam Price

Department

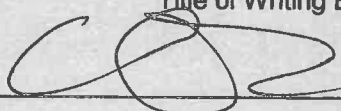
Engl- Course # and title 1158 - Southern Literature (American Voices)

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The Argonaut Pyramid

Title of Writing Exercises

Instructor's signature



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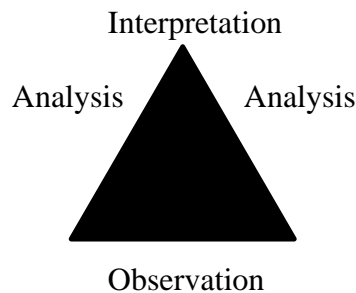
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The Argument Pyramid

One way to think about thesis creation is that you are building a pyramid. Pyramids are structurally sound, architecturally-speaking, because they have broad, stable bases, and, as they get taller, become narrower and smaller, coming to a point at the top. The base of your argument pyramid, so to speak, is comprised of all the close reading you do, finding a specific pattern or patterns in the text that you find interesting, strange, funny, or somehow noteworthy. This is the observational component of your argument; it is the basis for everything else that happens in your argument, and it must come first.

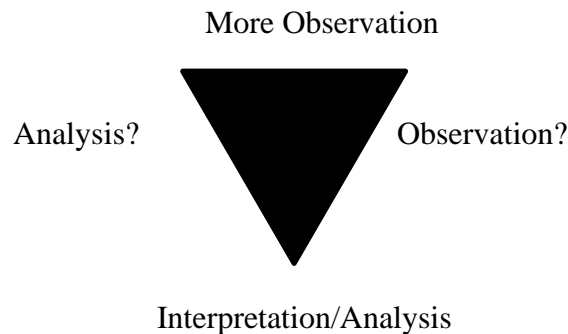
In the second step, you build upwards from your pyramid's foundation, and, in a sense, narrow your argument. That is, after taking the time to gather information—the observational foundation—you proceed to figure out how this information works. This is the analytical component of your argument; you can think of it as the middle of the pyramid. It rests on the observational foundation, and supports the third thesis component: your interpretation.

The interpretive element is the top of the pyramid. It is the point, figuratively and literally, that your argument is building toward. Without this point, the pyramid is unfinished. It completes the argument, and, in fact, can only exist by the first two levels of the argument being properly constructed.



Simple enough in theory, but, in practice, difficult to build. It is time-consuming and labor-intensive to gather information, analyze it, and say why it matters, for the simple reason that in doing so, you, the writer, are working toward an original conclusion that may surprise you. You are, in effect, learning about the text as you go, building up to an interesting and unforeseen point at the top of the pyramid.

Instead of taking the time to build this pyramid, what people often do is start with something they believe to be true about the text, and proceed to gather supporting evidence. This is the opposite of the pyramid technique. In fact, in pictorial form, we can represent this method as an upside-down pyramid. In this model, the pyramid balances on a pre-assigned, interpretive or analytical point, and is built out and up, by indiscriminately stacking various pieces of evidence on top of each other.



Obviously, a pyramid built on its point is not structurally sound or stable. Indeed, these types of arguments tend to collapse under their own weight, meandering from one disconnected piece of evidence to the next. And even if you manage to create an argument like this that doesn't completely fall apart, it still will probably not be an interesting argument, in terms of interpretation or structure. Interesting papers take the reader (and the writer) through a process of dialectic argument that builds to something unforeseen or unexpected. But in this model, nothing is unforeseen: the point is assumed at the beginning, and the rest of the paper/argument is merely an effort to prop this point up through sheer accumulation of "facts." These arguments, even if they make sense, are fundamentally boring.

In short, build from the bottom and work up to your point!